ENQUIRIES AND PROBLEMS

Dear Sir,

The Squire-less Village

Some observations on the Social History of Ampleforth

In the sixteenth century, following the dissolution of neighbouring Byland Abbey, the manorial system began to collapse, and the farms in Ampleforth parish passed into the hands of many owners, either on a freehold or copyhold tenure. Thus, there was never a squire in Ampleforth, though there was a strong squirearchy in all the surrounding villages. People who crossed their landlords in other villages, and had to leave their tied houses, naturally gravitated to Ampleforth. This meant that through the years vagrants, scoundrels, poachers, and ne'er-do-wells, unacceptable on other estates, tended to gather in the village too. There were two flourishing common lodging houses in Ampleforth until the 1914 war.

An important consequence of the lack of a squire was the development of a strong spirit of independence among the local trades people. For example, stonemasons and carpenters on neighbouring estates were employed by the landlord and worked only on estate property. In Ampleforth this was not so, and such tradesfolk were free agents, able to seek their business regardless of estate boundaries or privilege. They had to fend for themselves, and in so doing, prospered, because there were always plenty of skilled workmen needed to do private work.

Another important consequence of the absence of a squire can be seen in the religious field. In the seventeenth century, Quakers, who were not acceptable on many estates, found refuge here, and there was quite a sizeable settlement of them, complete with their own meeting house. All the Quakers required was complete freedom to order their lives as they believed best, and this they were able to do in Ampleforth. For the same reasons, Roman Catholics, who were equally unacceptable on many estates, found a refuge here too, and the present day Ampleforth Community of Benedictines, with their famous public school, owe much of their success to their freedom to live unmolested in the parish. In the same way, both the Wesleyan Methodists and the Primitive Methodists flourished in Ampleforth, and both built chapels in the village, whilst in the neighbouring villages it would not have been allowed by the squire.

-53-
Ampleforth was also noted, as might be expected from the situation outlined above, for its poachers, and many of the villagers in earlier times made part of their living out of poaching on neighbouring estates. It is said that no gamekeeper from the neighbouring estates came to Ampleforth if he could help it, because he would not be welcome, and was quite likely to be mobbed or cheated.

In earlier days, up to the Great War, there was a noticeable literary bent among the Ampleforth villagers. Not only were people given to writing poems - some of them printed privately - but there was the 'Ampleforth Play', which was an annual event, in which a group of actors with a band slowly progressed down the village street, all the while reciting the time-hallowed words of the play, with actions and music. None of it was ever written down, and tragically no one is alive today who can remember the words, and so the play has been lost to posterity.

I shall be very interested to hear from any readers who know of other villages which have had no squire: or from anyone who can throw light on this interesting subject.

Yours faithfully,

Patrick Rowley (The Rev.),
The Vicarage,
Ampleforth,
Yorks.

Dear Sir,

Marriage Seasonality - May Marriages

In connection with an enquiry into techniques for investigating seasonality, I have calculated the monthly totals of baptisms, burials and marriages for each decade recorded in the registers of a number of parishes. With the co-operation of members of the Matlock and Burton Joyce Population Study Groups and in particular Mrs. Janet Young of Nottingham, I have been able to collect figures from eleven Nottinghamshire and six Derbyshire parishes. The figures relating to marriage throw some light on Mr. E.W. Smith's query whether folklorists are right to assert that May was traditionally avoided as an unlucky month for marriage (L.P.S. No. 2 p. 67).